TOOTHSOME SHAD.

THE FINEST GRADE IS FOUND IN THE POTOMAC.

Means Adopted for Capturing the River Beauties--All Sorts of Nets Used--Planked Shad.

Potomac shad are regarded by epicures as the finest shad sold in any market in the United States, and for this reason there is ready sale for them in other places. Describing the methods employed in catching this toothsome fish the Washington Star says:

As soon as the ice had left the river the nets were thrown overboard. The gill nets were planted in the water and the haul seines were operated from shore, principally by horse power, although some of the smaller nets were handled by men. It is probable that the average person who is fond of shad has only the faintest idea of how they are caught. It is true that the seine haulers catch many thousands during the season, but the largest number are caught in gill nets.

What is known as the haul seine is nothing more nor less than a general dragging of the river, and everything before the net is almost sure to be landed on the shore. This is hard and troublesome work, and frequently hauls are made when the catch will by no means pay for the wear and tear on the nets. The different modes of catching shad are interesting. In addition to the use of nets it is said on good authority that the fish will rise to a fly, although anglers in this section make little or no effort to hook the toothsome delicacy.

Passengers on steamboats frequently see a dozen or more poles in the water, and from one pole to another pieces of netting are visible. This is the gill net and it is this net that is death to the shad. The nets, long and straight, are made of fine linen twine, with what the fishermen call a five inch mesh. Gill nets are generally set in the evening, the heavy stakes being driven so that the nets may be stretched at right angles to the current. These stakes are driven in the mud at intervals of about one hundred feet and from one to another the web is stretched, the top line being fastened to large corks, while heavy lead weights hold the bottom of the net in the river.

When the bottom of the river is too hard to permit the driving of the stakes the fishermen make float nets in the same way, using heavy anchors to keep the net in the proper position. Then the large schools of shad making their way with the current try to pass through the nets, which, of course, they cannot do. The twine slips behind their gills, escape is an impossibility and the fish are soon strangled to death.

Then there is the pound net, which is also a good one, not only for shad, but for other fish. That is a trap into which the fish are almost sure to drop when it is properly constructed. It consists of an obstruction in the river extending from the shore to deep water, and at the end of this long network, which is called the "leader," is a funnel shaped mouth leading into the pound or trap. The fish naturally go through the small opening in an effort to get around the obstruction, and those that go in seldom manage to get back through the opening.

Then there is the byke net, which is constructed on the order of a weir. It is used more extensively in bad weather than at any other time, for the reason the fish are taken from it alive, and are therefore that much fresher and in better condition for shipment.

These are the principal nets used in the Potomac. In some of the small tributaries weirs are used for catching fish for family use. At the river front in the vicinity of Twelfth street there is always a crowd of men and boys during the fish season, and when there are no boats to be unloaded nor any fish on the wharf there is an anxious look on their faces, for they are expecting the arrival of another load of fish from the lower river, when they will have an opportunity to get in a supply or pick up an odd. Along the line of Water street for two or three squares, as well as on what is known as the "Fishtown" wharf, fish hucksters have their wagons, and sometimes there are more than a hundred wagons there, awaiting the arrival of a boat or the sale of a cheap lot of fish.

The owners of the packing houses have most of the fish cleaned on the wharf, where the work is done by men and women of both colors, who render songs and the choruses of plantation melodies. When these people get through with the fish they are put in tubs and washed, and later they find their way to the packing houses, where they are put in salt in barrels or small tubs. Many of them are sold in this way, while others are put up for smoking purposes. Of late years many families put up ther own fish for winter use.

The question is frequently asked, "What becomes of the shad in the winter?"

It is certain that they leave the fresh water and make their way south in the salt water for the winter season, returning again in the spring of the year to the waters of their birth to spawn. It is singular, but the fish invariably make their way to the beginning of tidewater. During the winter months many are caught by the deep salt water netters.

It is related that shad has become so highly prized as food fish only within the last half century. In colonial history when shad are mentioned the writers seldom have a favorable word to say about them, and generally refer to them with contempt. The northern rivers in that period were filled with them, and while the Indians speared them and used them for food, the white settlers did not do so to any considerable extent. Even in those days the fish were smoked by the Indians and put away for winter use.

The shad is not found in all parts of the United States, so that in some sections it is considered more of a delicacy than in others. There are many ways to cook the fish after they are caught, but most epicures agree that the planked shad beats them all. A celebrated cook who has made a study of planked shad describes the cooking, as follows.

"Take a plank of hickory (oak will do if the other can't be had) three inches thick, eighteen inches wide and two feet long. Then get a fresh-caught shad, scale it, split down the back, clean, wash and wipe dry. Sift it carefully with salt and pepper. Lay your plank before an open fire until it is very hot. Then spread your shad upon it and nail it, skin side down, to the wood with about eight large tacks. Place before the fire and turn till well done. Cover all over with butter, and serve smoking hot on the plank."

A Remarkable Social Function.

A somewhat remarkable social function took place a few nights ago at Washington, it being the celebration of the silver wedding of "Uncle Jerry," the colored messenger, who has been at the Executive mansion for years. Every one from the time of President Grant who has had anything to do with the White House knows "Uncle Jerry," and he is indeed one of the characters of Washington. Administrations have come and gone, but Uncle Jerry has remained a faithful attendant on the President. He is one of the most astute diplomats imaginable, and could easily give points to the State Department officials. It is on account of this very qualification that he has been able to retain his place. Very few persons could boast of so distinguished a list of invited guests as the happy couple. Representatives of families who have occupied the White House in years gone by sent presents and kind greetings, and distinguished persons connected with this and other administrations sent their congratulations as well as presents.

Beside the President and Mrs. Cleveland, Mrs. U. S. Grant, Mrs. Sartoris, Mrs. Harriet Lane Johnson, Mrs. Stanley Brown, who was Mollie Garfield, were among those who did not forget Uncle Jerry, and there were members of the Hayes and Lincoln family, although out of town, who remembered the occasion. Altogether Uncle Jerry and his wife were kept as busy as they could be until a late hour answering congratulations and the good wishes of their distinguished friends.

Among those present were Postmaster General and Mrs. Bissell, Secretary and Mrs. Lamont and Private Secretary and Mrs. Thurber. Uncle Jerry and his wife received a large number of presents, nearly every employe of the White House sending some little silver token.

A Mexican Bullfight.

"At a given signal, amidst an uproar of applause, in rushed a huge black bull, decked with the ribbons of his ganaderio, breathing a defiance and a hate that seemed to have been born of the moment, but that filled his entire huge frame. The tableau became a vivante then. For a moment the great beast wavered, then charged obliquely at the red mantle of an especially decorative chulo, and, like a flash, wheeled and made for a mounted man. In an instant there was a confused mass of man, horse and bull writhing upon the ground.

From the red mantles of the chulos and the charge of a second picador the mighty monarch of the ring turned in a truly regal way, and from disemboweling the horse he chased a chulo so hard as to compel him to vault clear from the ring and give tauros a moment's peace. In a second more the mantle of a picador caught his imperial eye, and again horse and rider bit the dust. A too reckless chulo here met his fate, for, flaunting his rag before the quivering beast, he slipped, fell, and before his companions could divert the avalanche of flesh he was crushed like a strawberry upon the sand, and the bull was away again to meet his own doom. With the sinuous grace of a panther, Pacheco, the expada, had sprung toward him, grasped his tail and given it a twist of such exquisite torture that the bull, with lowered front, made for him, only to receive the sword which the great espada had, until then, concealed in a muleta of blue silk. Straight in the quivering flesh above the spine it sunk until the spring of life was touched, and without a sound the splendid animal fell dead."

It's All Fudge at Vassar.

It is said the Vassar girls at college have "fudges" nearly every night. Fudges are Vassar chocolates, and they are simply the most delicious edibles ever manufactured by a set of sweetmeat loving girls. Their origin is wrapped in mystery. Their receipt is handed down from year to year by old students to new, and they belong peculiarly to Vassar. To make them take two cups of sugar, one cup of milk, a piece of butter one-half the size of an egg, and a teaspoonful of vanilla extract. The mixture is cooked until it begins to get grimy. Then it is taken from the fire, stirred briskly and turned into buttered tins. Before it hardens it is cut into squares. You may eat the fudge either cold or hot; it is good either way. It never tastes so delicious, however, as when made at college over a spluttering gas lamp, in the seclusion of your own apartments. The various difficulties that this method entail but makes the fudge taste sweeter.—New Orleans Picayune.

Defining Hardwood.

According to a recent legal decision reported in the Timberman, hard wood is "any tree that has a leaf as distinguished from a needle." A man contracted to deliver to a railroad hard wood cordwood, and he delivered poplar in part fulfillment of the contract. The railroad rejected this as not hard wood, and sued, but the contractor won the case on the decision of the court as reported above. Women will now have a distinct and lawful standard to gauge their hard wood furniture descriptions.

THE BACHELOR.

Treatment He Once Received at the Law's Hands.

When a proposal was made not so long ago to tax the bachelors of France, as they were taxed in the days of the First Republic, the fact was recalled that republics generally have been hard upon the celibates. The wise Plato condemned the single men to a fine, and in Sparta they were driven at stated times to the Temple of Hercules by the women, who there drilled and castigated them in true military style.

The ancient Romans, too, were severe with their bachelors, who were made to pay heavy fines; and, worse than that, for after the siege of Veii Camillus is recorded to have compelled them to marry the widows of the soldiers who had fallen in the war.

Again, in the time of Augustus, the married men, all other things being equal, were preferred to the single men for the public offices. Then the Roman who had three children was exempted from personal taxes, and the bachelors not only had to pay them, but were prevented from inheriting the property of any one not a Roman citizen.

Coming to more recent times, we have several instances of a like kind recorded for us by a recent writer on the subject. In the French settlement of Canada, for example, the single men, that they might be forced to marry, were subjected to heavy taxation and to restrictions on their trade and movements generally.

Those who married were dealt with, on the other hand, in a generous spirit. Not only were they provided with a good wife and a comfortable home, but they were rewarded according to the number of their offspring. The father of ten children, for instance, was pensioned for life at the rate of 300 livres a year. If he had twelve children he had 100 livres a year more, and the amount ran up to 1,200 livres a year when fifteen children blessed the union.

About the close of the seventeenth century the local authorities in Eastham, in Massachusetts, voted that every unmarried man in the township should kill six blackbirds or three cows yearly as long as he remained single, producing the scalps in proof; and as a penalty for not obeying the order he was forbidden to marry until he had made up all arrears. The requirements here were almost nominal; but it was somewhat different in Maryland, where half a century later the colonial Assembly imposed a tax of five shillings yearly upon all bachelors over thirty—as well as upon widowers without children—who were possessed with $200.

At home we were not quite so severe when William III. chose to single out the bachelors for special enactments. In those days a commoner who remained single at twenty-five had to pay a shilling fine yearly, and the amount was increased with rank or title. A duke was supposed to be a special offender in not taking a wife, and had to pay for his whim to the extent of twelve pounds ten shillings per annum. It was thus evident that the fact was recognized that the prosperity of a country depends upon its married citizens.

A Large Book.

In one of the recent numbers of Harper's Young People a short sketch appeared describing the smallest book probably in existence.

As an offset to this it will doubtless interest the reader to know of a certain famous copy of the Koran, or bible of the Moslems. This book's enormous size has given it a great reputation. It is something like five feet long by three feet wide.

The letters or characters average three inches in height, and the book itself is about a foot in thickness. It is jealously guarded, and although a religious book still it would be rather amusing to watch the efforts of a couple of full grown men opening it, for all the world like one would open the flap doors of a cellar, the binding being, literally, in boards. The labor of preparing such a work covered a period of six years.

A Devoted Cow.

A Mr. Wood, who lives near Hood's Mill, owns a very peculiar milch cow. She is just an ordinary black cow, but is so much attached to Mr. Wood's children that she does not like to be separated from them. If the children are at home the cow will stay in a pasture with fence three feet high; but if the children are taken away she will throw down even very high fences in order to follow them. At different times when the cow would be in the pasture Mr. Wood has slipped the children away from home, but when she came up and missed them she would get out and track them as a dog would do until she found them.—Savannah (Ga.) News.

The Virtue in Oyster Shells.

Ground oyster shells were prescribed by empirics in the olden time for goitrous, ricketty and scrofulous children. In a communication to the Academy of Medicine in Paris Drs. Muntz and Chatin say they were right. Oyster shells were long ago known to contain lime, nitrogen, iron and sulphur. Beside these constituents they hold manganese, magnesia, fluor bromure, phosphoric acid and iodine—all excellent for feeble children. The bromure taken from the oyster shell is a strong antiseptic. Teeth, they say, would be much improved were pulverized oyster shells given in food to growing children and to nurses.

Enormous Houses in New Guinea.

The enormous size and massive structure of native houses is among the recent surprising discoveries of explorers among the villages—inhabited by numerous warlike tribes—scattered along the streams of New Guinea. Houses 300 to 400 feet long and 100 feet high, among the largest in the world, are reported to be not uncommon.

In contradistinction to the bonnets, which are small, the round hats are larger than ever and most picturesque.